Archaeology of Indiana Avenue Neighborhood

Madame C.J. Walker Legacy and the Walker Site

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In 2009, Dr. Paul Mullins, Dr. Lewis Jones, and the IUPUI archeological field school excavated the sites of Madame CJ Walker's former home and two adjacent lots along North West Street. The buildings at this site were the homes of early westside residents - including briefly Freeman Ransom and Dr. Joseph Ward - as well as shops and storefronts managed by Madame Walker and others.

> *"Each morning's mail brought sacks of handwritten orders for the Wonderful Hair Grower to Madame Walker's Indianapolis office."*
>
> *- A'lelia Bundles (On Her Own Ground, 145)*

A modern aerial view of the Walker Theater and former site of Madame Walker's home and adjacent factory, now apartments (2023)

Great Migration and Art

"The West Street site sits in the heart of African American Indianapolis, a neighborhood that was home to African Americans in the second half of the 19th century and had become an overwhelmingly African American community in the first decade of the 20th century," (Mullins, 3)

Number 3 in the 60 panel art series by Jacob Lawrence that depicted the flight of Black families from the South to the North in search of a better life.

"Much of the near-Westside became predominately Black around the same moment, fueled by the vast number of African Americans fleeing the South in a mass displacement commonly referred to as the Great Migration. Between 1910 and 1920 Indianapolis' Black population increased from

21,816 to 34,690, and a vast number of these newcomers came from the upper South, especially Kentucky," (2009 IUPUI Archaeology Field School of the Madame Walker Site).

Number 57 also in Jacob Lawrence's series of the Great Migration captioned, " The female workers were the last to arrive north."

This photo shows a female laborer at work in the north after migrating. Women were usually enlisted into highly domestic work, including Madame Walker in her early days. Before her entrance as an entrepreneur, philanthropist, political and social activist, her name was Sarah Walker. She worked as a cook for private families and was tasked with "day work" like laundry and cleaning for minimal pay.

Madame CJ Walker's life history reflects the "complicated potential of the American Dream as well as the profound inequalities placed before women and people of color" (Mullins, Price of Progress, 3)

"News of the Colored Folks"

May 6, 1911

Popular newspaper, The Indianapolis Star, highlights official sale of the Walker site from former owner, Harriet G. Davis, to Madame Walker. “To Sarah Walker ... [on the] west side of West Street, north of Indiana avenue" for $3500" (Indianapolis Star).

July 2, 1911

"On July 2, 1911 the Indianapolis Star’s “News of the Colored Folks” column indicated that “The beautiful and recently remodeled home of Mr. and Mrs. C J Walker on North West Street was thrown open to their friends Tuesday evening for a housewarming.

Walker Site: Context of Indiana Avenue

> *"You know what I compare Indiana Avenue with now is Broad Ripple...how we would walk up and down the street and go into one little nightclub to the other"*
>
> *Sadie Flowers Milton (Price of Progress pp. 25)*

In the 1900s, there was a thriving Black community located in and around Indiana Avenue. This street housed much of the area's entertainment: restaurants, theaters, clubs, and bars.

Many people quoted by Dr. Paul Mullins expressed how they could go to either the Walker Theater or the Lido Theater

and not come out until the evening. They could make a whole day of it.

> "You could go in there at ten-o-clock in the morning and probably come out at four or five-o-clock in the evening"
>
> *Kenneth Adams, Jr. (Price of Progress pp. 23)*

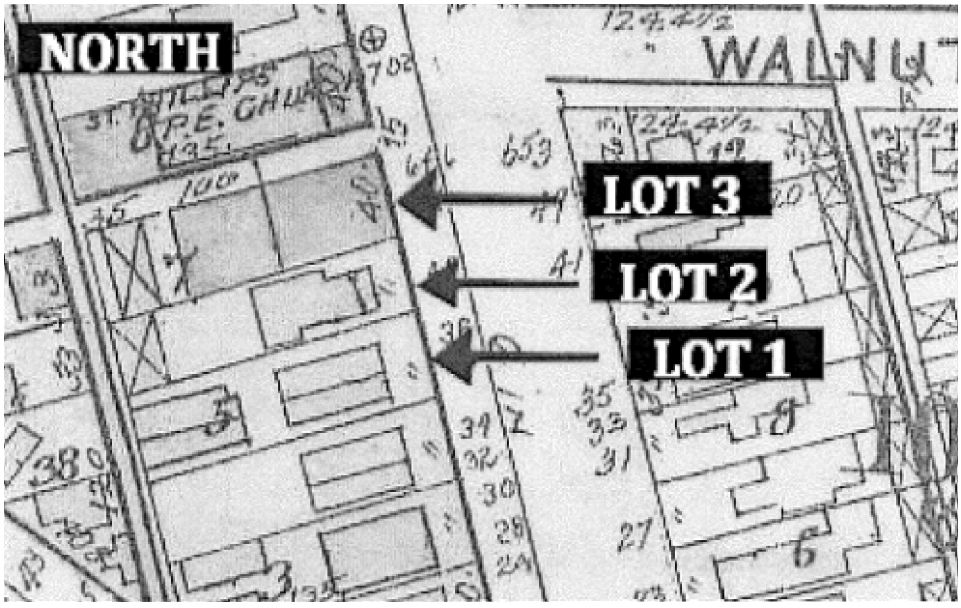
The area of Indiana Avenue provided a wealth of experiences for everyone who lived there. This diverse "cultural mecca" eventually faced a decline due to economic factors as well as mass urban renewal projects, which destroyed many historic structures and heritage.

comparison photo -- before & after Indiana Ave.

Here's a link to the current webpage for the Madame Walker Legacy Center where there is more information about the history of Indiana Avenue and Madame C.J. Walker.

Sanborn Insurance Maps

The images below, pulled from Paul Mullin's 2009 site summary, showcases exactly what the Walker site is situated on top of. These three lots, labelled 1, 2, and 3, went through various stages of residency, with many inhabitants from a variety of backgrounds.



(image from 1916 Baist Map from the P. Mullins 2009 site summary)

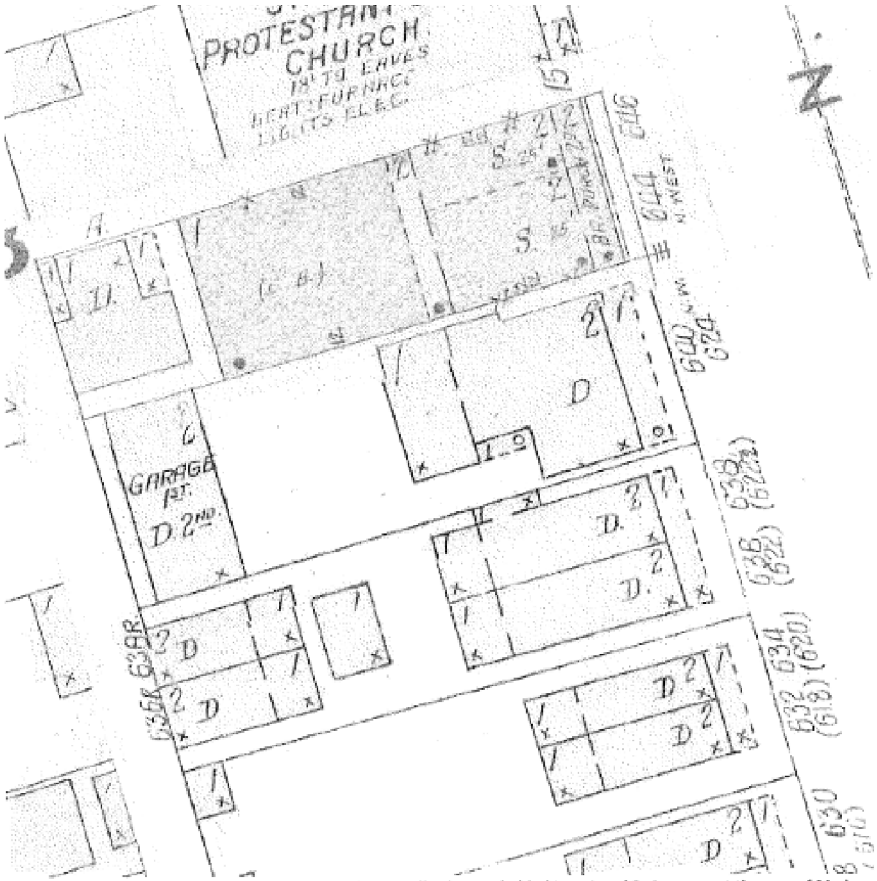


Figure 6: This close-up of the project area in 1898 reveals the two alley homes behind Lots 1 and 3. A garage at the rear of Madam Walker's future home in Lot 2 had a dwelling above the garage/stable space.

(retrieved from P. Mullins 2009 site summary)

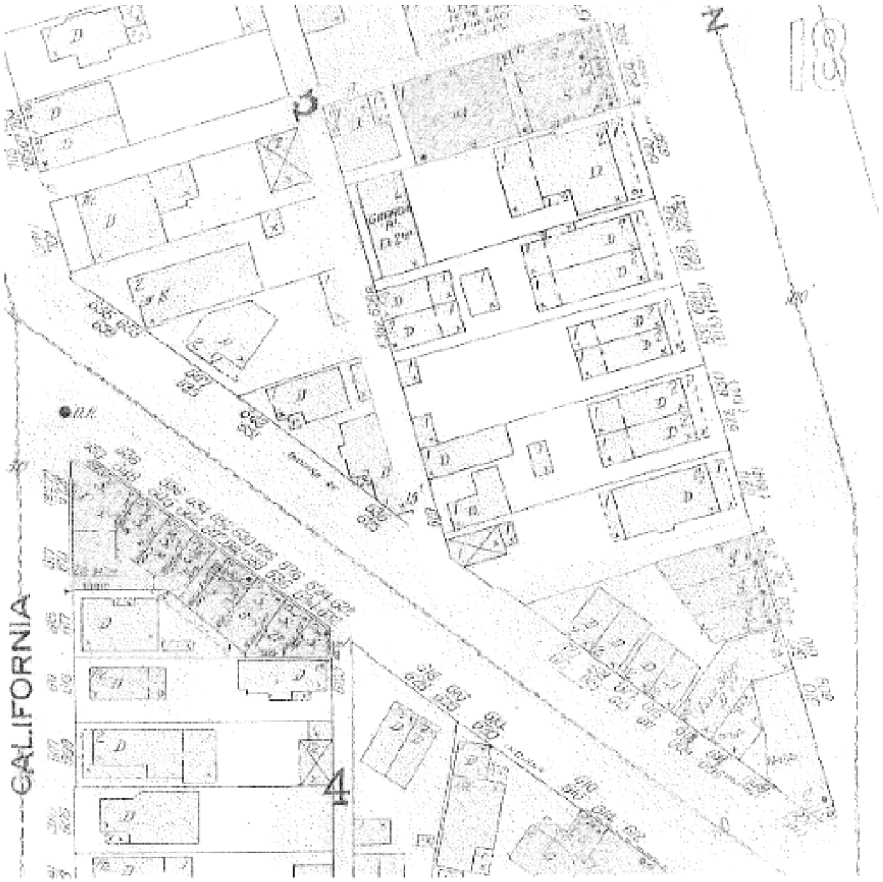


Figure 5: The 1898 Sanborn map reflects the marketing district that had emerged on Indiana Avenue (at the base of this map), and alley homes had begun to appear along the rear lot lines of many homes as the population began to increase.

(retrieved from P. Mullins 2009 site summary)

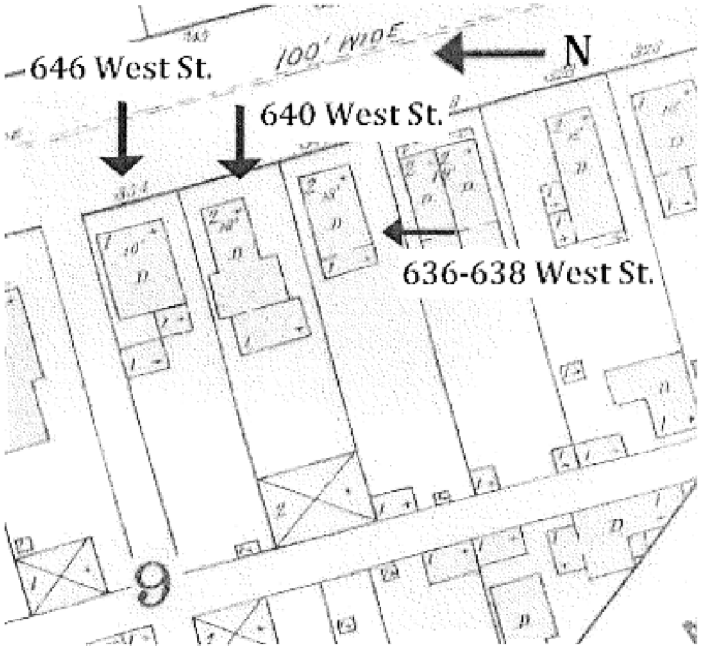


Figure 4: Project Area Close-up, 1887 Sanborn Insurance Map with contemporary street numbers

(retrieved from P. Mullins 2009 site summary)

Residents of Walker Site

~1863 to ~1911 : Abel & Harriet Davis living on Lot 2

Abel Davis was born in New Hampshire around 1828 and married Harriet in 1858. The couple then moved to Indianapolis, Indiana between 1863 and 1867, but did not move to the project site immediately. They would eventually move to Lot 2 and build a house, where Madame Walker would eventually live, between 1871 and 1875. Abel Davis died between 1906 and 1910, leaving Harriet to potentially rent to Sarah and CJ Walker. She eventually sold the home on Lot 2 to Sarah Walker in 1911 and moved away from the project site.

~1871 to ~1880 : Margaret Fisher Espy (Espey) on Lot 3

Margaret Fisher Espy (sometimes written 'Espey') was born in Pennsylvania in about 1801 and married to cabinet maker George F Espy, who was born in Pennsylvania in about 1799. The couple moved to Indiana between 1836 and 1841, but Margaret first appeared on an Indiana census in 1850. George passed away between 1850 and 1858, leaving Margaret to move onto Lot 3 between 1871 and 1875 and moved off of the lot between 1875 and 1880. Margaret was buried at Crown Hill cemetery next to George in 1887, but George may have been reinterred there sometime after his death.

~1875 to ~1891 : Uzal and Annie Gadd on Lot 3

Uzal Gadd was taxed as a retail dealer in 1863 in Shelbyville, Indiana. He married Annie Gadd in 1867 and they moved onto Lot 3 between 1875 and 1880. By 1891, the couple had moved off of Lot 3 and out of the project site area. It is possible that there were other residents that lived on Lot 3 in between Margaret Espy and the Gadd family.

~1880 to ~1891 : Louis & Mary Foreman on Lot 1

Born in 1829, Louis M. Foreman appeared in an 1880 census as a carpenter living at 342 North West Street (also called Lot 1) with his wife Mary, son Alfred, and daughter Mary Ella Irick. The Foremans appear to have moved off of Lot 1 and onto Lot 3 by 1891 due to Louis M. Foreman being listed as the home owner at 350 North West Street (Lot 3). In 1891, Alfred Foreman (listed as "elk" in the census) was also living on Lot 3 with Charles Bance, Horace Stewart, and Lude Wilson all appearing as laborers at 350 North West Street. It seems that the Foremans were living in the home at the front of the lot in 1891 and may had some, or all, of the men as boarders. Lude Wilson may have been living in the alley house on the back of the lot, as it appears as "home" in a census. Alfred Foreman eventually became a coppersmith and married Maggie Mae Gresh in May of 1894. The couple had two sons born in 1895 and 1896, but had left the near-Westside by 1900.

~1898 : Lot 3 becomes a storefront

By 1880, all three lots in the project site area contained residences, but in 1898 the front of Lot 3 was listed as a store on the Sanborn Insurance maps. There was a single-family residence built along the alley at the back of the lot between 1889 and 1891.

~1900 to ~1904 : George W. & Ella Hulse on Lot 3

George W. and Ella Hulse were married in 1898 and moved into the project site on Lot 3 in 1900. George was a hardware salesman in 1900 and managed a grocery store on West North street with his brother, but appeared in a 1910 census as a chair finisher. In 1998, a store appeared on Lot 3 on a Sanborn Insurance map that showed a residence on the back of the lot. The Hulses may have been living in the rear alley structure that was eventually replace by Madame Walker's garage and factory building. The Hulses seem to have lived on Lot 3 between the years of 1900 and 1904.

~1904 to ~1914 : Oel Buck & Mary Ella Irick on Lot 3

Oel Buck and Mary Ella Irick seem to have lived on Lot 3 in the project site area between the years of 1904 and 1914. While there is no clear relationship between the two individuals, after moving out of the lot between 1912 and 1914, they both moved to 1155 College Avenue. There is some confusion as to who resided on this lot because in 1906, only Mary Ella appears on the census at Lot 3, but both Mary Ella and Oel appear in 1910. Because they both appear in 1910, the 1906 census may be a mistake. In 1910, Mary Ella appears as a home owner and Oel as a renter managing an Indiana Avenue candy store. Their neighbors in Lot 2 during this time were Sarah and CJ Walker. Mary Ella and Oel remained in the home in 1912, but had moved by 1914 as part of exodus of White residents leaving project area in short period of time.

~1914 to ~1915 : Joseph Henry Ward on Lot 3

Born in North Carolina in 1870, Joseph Henry Ward lived in Chapel Hill in 1880 until ultimately making his way to Indiana. In 1890, he appeared as a servant living at 291 West Michigan Street before attending medical college and graduating by 1897. He married his first wife, Mamie, in 1897 as well. His office on the project site area opened around 1898, but before that it seems he held his office at his home at 722 Indiana Avenue. He hosted Madame Walker at his home at 722 Indiana Avenue for a short time, which is when she served her first Indianapolis customers. Between 1900 and 1910, he remarried Zela Louise Locklear and had a son, Joseph Ward Jr. in 1909. In 1914, he was Madame Walker's personal physician and held his office on Lot 3. By 1915, Ward had moved out of the project area, making for an exceptionally short tenure in the project area.

~1940

A beauty salon and feed store are on Lot 3

Present Day

The 632 MLK Apartments currently cover all three lots of the archaeological site.

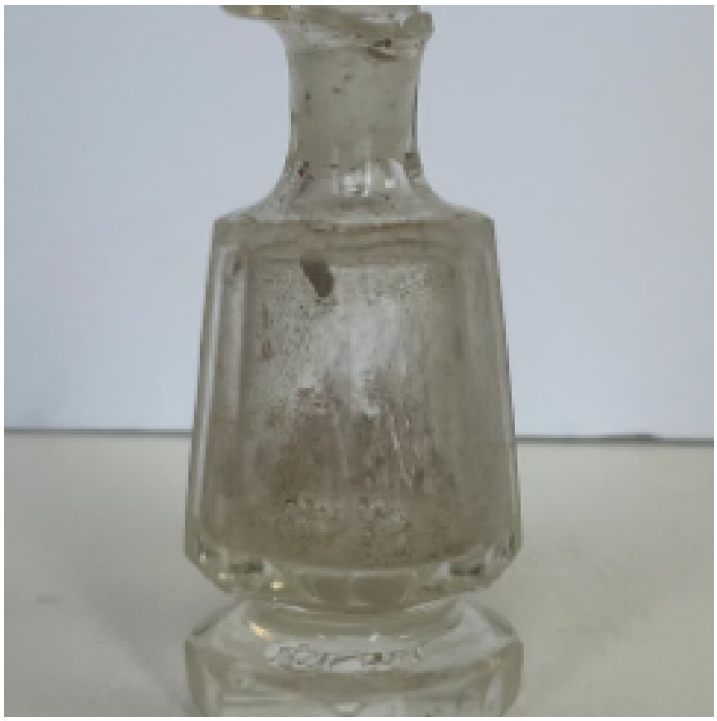
" In 1870, 974 African Americans called Indiana Avenue Home," (Madame Walker Legacy Center).

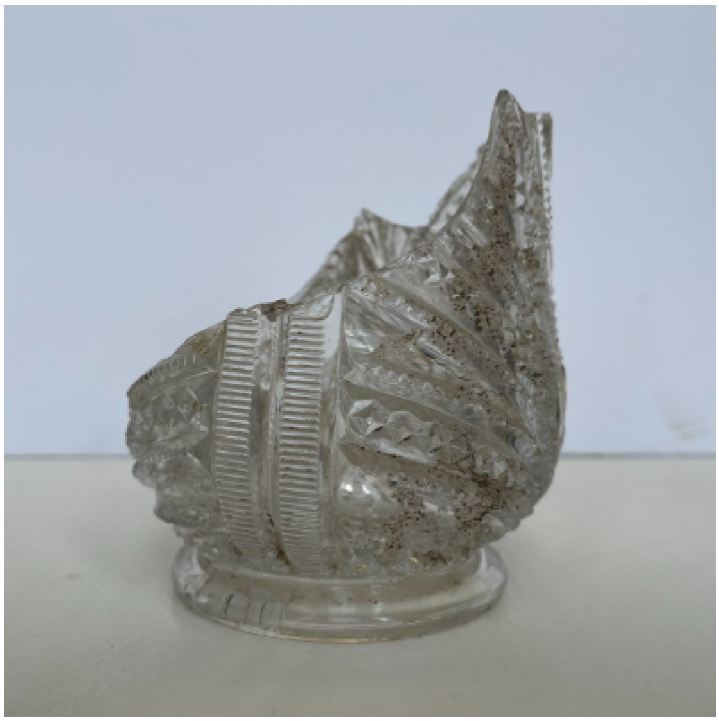
A word about the lead Archaeologists...

The late Paul Mullins was a Historical Archaeologists who studied material culture at the color line in Indianapolis. He focused on the displacement of African Americans in Indianapolis, that served what is now known as Indiana University Purdue University. He is a forerunner for community archaeology and centralized voices of those who lived at the sociocultural margins of these spaces.

Lewis Jones is an alumnus of IU Bloomington/IUPUI, and now teaches anthropology at Gettysburg College and Harrisburg Area Community College in Pennsylvania. He is interested in Historical Archaeology, Culture (and its effects on Race), Race and Consumption, and the African Diaspora, as well as Memorialization and Food and Culture.

(photo and bio from https://about.me/lecjones)





Artifacts highlights uncovered at the Site. Clockwise, L-R: flask, bottom of glass pitcher, brick and drain cap, Liberty Head nickel, copper spoon, Bromo-Seltzer bottle, glass bottle likely containing hair-care product from Madam Walker's factory (several bottles were discovered with this pearly-pink iridescent sheen), wooden toothbrush handle, porcelain doll hand, pig molars, Columbia Catsup bottle, Woodbury cold cream jar.

References and Notes

Bundles, A'Lelia P. *On Her Own Ground the Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*. Washington Square Press, 2002.

Archaeological Site Report and material compiled by Paul Mullins, located in IUI Department of Anthropology Sharepoint files, Site Summary 12MA949.